

Khadafy is not terrorism

WASHINGTON—Some people so dominate the processes of which they are a part that they and the process become almost identical. To a considerable extent, Martin Luther King Jr. was the civil rights movement; John F. Kennedy was the return of American idealism; Anwar Sadat was the Middle East peace process; Yasser Arafat was [though no longer is] Palestinian resistance.

But if personification is sometimes a useful shorthand way of dealing with movements, ideas and processes, it also can be a dangerous distraction that obscures more than it illuminates. Libya's Moammar Khadafy, as barbaric and "flaky" as he may be, is not terrorism.

The problem with making the Libyan the embodiment of international terrorism, as President Reagan came too close to doing at his news conference a week ago, is that it gets us thinking that if we can somehow isolate him, and perhaps one or two others, we can eliminate international terrorism.

It obscures the fact that the principal source of terrorism in the Middle East is the absence of any effective international attention to the plight of the Palestinians. It may not follow that resolution of that problem—even the creation of an independent Palestinian state—will spell an end to terrorism. But it seems unarguable that failure to work toward a solution, including

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the refusal of America and Israel to talk to the Palestine Liberation Organization, virtually guarantees that terrorism will increase and probably spread to the U.S.

None of this means Reagan is wrong to try to isolate Khadafy, who, our intelligence experts tell us, was an important factor in the slaughter in the Rome and Vienna airports, and in other terrorist acts as well. In fact, I think Reagan is handling the matter well [though the goading and silly name-calling at the press conference is likely to prove counterproductive].

Whatever his failings with regard to the "peace process," Reagan is right to serve notice that the United States is prepared to act—unilaterally if necessary—in response to the killing of Americans. And though his halting of all U.S. trade with Libya is, given the relative insignificance of trade between the two countries, more form than substance, it does serve to highlight the irresolute economics-above-honor attitude of America's European allies.

It is interesting that Reagan, still viewed in much of the world as a Wild West gunslinger, has recognized that the sort of threats that might work with a stagecoach robber or a rustler don't work at all with terrorists who are prepared to

die for what they perceive as a noble cause.

He understands that it would be far more effective to deny safe haven for terrorist organizations, and that one way of doing that would be to punish, with economic isolation, nations that provide them bases and training facilities. It's too bad our European allies lack that understanding, or the courage to act on it.

But while the President's policy for dealing with terrorism makes sense, it is also important to deal with the roots of terrorism—not in the sociological sense of dealing with the roots of crime but in recognizing that terrorists who are prepared to die for a cause are not deterred by the threat of criminal sanctions.

It's important to understand that some terrorist activity is an attempt to disrupt peace negotiations. But most of it is a direct result of the absence of negotiations. Thus, while Reagan is using his influence to persuade America's allies to join him in an international campaign against terrorism, he must also work to persuade Israel to join him in working toward resolution of the Palestinian problem.

There's no point in pretending that the problem of terrorism can be resolved merely by naming it. Khadafy and tightening the screws on Libya.

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